

1578/9051

4

Tancred and Sigismunda.

A

TRAGEDY.

As PERFORMED at the

THEATRE-S-ROYAL

I N

DRURY-LANE

A N D

COVENT-GARDEN.

By JAMES THOMSON,
Author of the SEASONS.



L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXXV.

P R O L O G U E.

BOLD is the man, who, in this nicer age,
Presumes to tread the chaste, corrected stage.

Now, with gay tinsel arts we can no more
Conceal the want of nature's sterling ore :

Our spells are vanish'd, broke our magic wand,
That us'd to waft you over sea and land :

Before your light the fairy people fade ;

The demons fly---the ghost itself is laid.

In vain of martial scenes the loud alarms ;

The mighty prompter thund'ring out to arms :

The playhouse posse clatt'ring from afar ;

The close-wedg'd battle, and the din of war.

Now ev'n the senate seldom we convene ;

The yawning fathers nod behind the scene.

Your taste rejects the glitt'ring false sublime,

To sigh in metaphor, and die in rhyme.

High rant is tumbled from his gall'ry throne :

Description, dreams---nay, similies are gone.

What shall we then ? to please you how devise ?

Whose judgment sits not in your ears and eyes.

Thrice happy ! could we catch great Shakespeare's art,

To trace the deep recesses of the heart ;

His simple, plain sublime ; to which is giv'n

To strike the soul with darted flame from heav'n :

Could we awake soft Otway's tender woe,

The pomp of verse, and golden lines of Rowe !

We to your hearts apply ; let them attend :

Before their silent, candid bar, we bend.

If warm'd, they listen, 'tis our noblest praise :

If cold, they wither all the muse's bays.



EPILOGUE.

CRAMM'D to the throat with wholesome, moral stuff;
Alas! poor audience! you have had enough.
Was ever hapless heroine of a play
In such a piteous plight as ours to-day?
Was ever woman so by love betray'd?
Match'd with two husbands, and yet---die a maid.
But, bless me!--hold!--What sounds are these I hear!--
I see the TRAGIC MUSE, herself, appear.

The back scene opens, and discovers a romantic sylvan landscape; from which SIGISMUNDA, in the character of the TRAGIC MUSE, advances slowly to music, and speaks the following lines.

Hence with your flippant epilogue, that tries
To wipe the virtuous tear from British eyes;
That dares my moral, tragic scene profane,
With strains---at best, unsuited, light, and vain.
Hence from the pure, unsully'd beams, that play
In yon fair eyes, where virtue shines---away!

Britons, to you, from chaste Castalian groves,
Where dwell the tender, oft unhappy loves;
Where shades of heroes roam, each mighty name,
And court my aid, to raise again to fame;
To you I come; to freedom's noblest seat;
And in Britannia fix my last retreat,

In Greece, and Rome, I watch'd the public weal;
The purple tyrant trembled at my steel:
Nor did I less o'er private sorrows reign,
And mend the melting heart with softer pain.
On France and you then rose my bright'ning star
With social ray---The arts are ne'er at war.
O! as your fire and genius stronger blaze;
As yours are gen'rous freedom's bolder lays;
Let not the Gallic taste leave yours behind,
In decent manners and in life refin'd;
Banish the motley mode, to tag low verse,
The laughing ballad to the mournful hearse.
When thro' five acts your hearts have learnt to glow,
Touch'd with the sacred force of honest woe;
O keep the dear impression on your breast,
Nor idly lose it for a wretched jest!

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

M E N.

TANCRED, Count of LECCE.

MATTEO SIFFREDI, Lord High Chancellor
of SICILY.

EARL OSMOND, Lord High Constable of SICILY.

RODOLPHO, Friend to TANCRED, and
Captain of the Guards.

W O M E N.

SIGISMUNDA, Daughter of SIEFREDI.

LAURA, Sister of RODOLPHO, and Friend
to SIGISMUNDA.

BARONS, OFFICERS, GUARDS, &c.

SCENE, the City of PALERMO in SICILY.

TAN-



TANCRED *and* SIGISMUNDA.

ACT I. SCENE I.

SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA.



H fatal day to Sicily!--The king
Then touches his last moments?

Lau. So 'tis fear'd.

Sig. Laura, 'tis said,---the heart is some-
times charg'd

With a prophetic sadness: such, methinks,
Now hangs on mine. The king's approaching death
Suggests a thousand fears. What troubles thence
May throw the state once more into confusion;
What sudden changes in my father's house
May rise, and part me from my dearest Tancred,
Alarms my thought.

Lau. The fears of love-sick fancy;
Perversely busy to torment itself.
But be assur'd, your father's steady friendship,
Join'd to a certain genius, that commands,
Not kneels to fortune, will support and cherish,
Here in the public eye of Sicily,
This---I may call him---his-adopted son,
The noble Tancred, form'd to all his virtues.

Sig. Ah form'd to charm his daughter! This fair
morn

Has tempted far the chace. Is he not yet
Return'd?

Lau. No---When your father to the king,
Who now expiring lies, was call'd in haste,
He sent each way his messengers to find him;
With such a look of ardor and impatience,
As if this near event was to Count Tancred
Of more importance than I comprehend.

Sig. There lies, my Laura, o'er my Tancred's birth
A cloud I cannot pierce. With princely cost,
Nay, with respect, which oft I have observ'd,
Stealing, at times, submissive o'er his features,
In Belmont's woods my father rear'd this youth---

8 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Ah woods! where first my artless bosom learnt
The sighs of love.---He gives him out the son
Of an old friend, a baron of Apulia,
Who in the late crusado bravely fell.
What says Rodolpho? Does he truly credit
This story of his birth?

Lau. He has sometimes,
Like you, his doubts; yet, when maturely weigh'd,
Believes it true. As for Lord Tancred's self,
He never entertain'd the slightest thought
That verg'd to doubt; but oft laments his state,
By cruel fortune so ill-pair'd to yours.

Sig. Merit like his, the fortune of the mind,
Beggars all wealth---Then to your brother, Laura,
He talks of me?

Lau. Of nothing else. Howe'er
The talk begin, it ends with Sigismunda.
Their morning, noon-tide, and their evening walks
Are full of you; and all the woods of Belmont
Inamour'd with your name-----

Sig. Away, my friend;
You flatter---yet the dear delusion charms.

Lau. No, Sigismunda, 'tis the strictest truth,
Nor half the truth, I tell you. Ev'n with fondness
My brother talks for ever of the passion,
That fires young Tancred's breast. So much it strikes
him,

He praises love as if he were a lover.
He blames the false pursuits of vagrant youth;
Calls them gay folly, a mistaken struggle
Against best-judging nature. Heaven, he says,
In lavish bounty form'd the heart for love;
In love included all the finer seeds
Of honour, virtue, friendship, purest bliss---

Sig. Virtuous Rodolpho!

Lau. Then his pleasing theme
He varies to the praises of your lover---

Sig. And what, my Laura, says he on that subject?

Lau. He says that, tho' he were not nobly born,
Nature has form'd him noble, gen'rous, brave;
That every easy virtue is his own;
Not learnt by painful labour, but inspir'd,
Implanted in his soul---chiefly one charm
He in his graceful character observes:

That tho' his passions burn with high impatience,

And

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 9

And sometimes, from a noble heat of nature,
Are ready to fly off, yet the least check
Of ruling reason brings them back to temper,
And gentle softness.

Sig. True! O true, Rodolpho!
Blest be thy kindred worth for loving his!
He is all warmth, all amiable fire,
All quick heroic ardor! temper'd soft
With gentleness of heart, and manly reason!
If virtue were to wear a human form,
To light it with her dignity and flame,
Then soft'ning mix her smiles and tender graces,
O she would chuse the person of my Tancred!
Go on, my friend, go on, and ever praise him;
The subject knows no bounds, nor can I tire,
While my breast trembles to that sweetest music!
The heart of woman tastes no truer joy,
Is never flatter'd with such dear enchantment---
As when she hears the praises of the man she loves---
Lau. Madam, your father comes.

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI. SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

SIFFREDI. (To an Attendant as he enters.)

Lord Tancred then

Is found?

Att. My Lord, he quickly will be here.

Siff. 'Tis well---retire---You too, my daughter,
leave me.

Sig. I go, my father---but how fares the king?

Siff. He is no more. Gone to that awful state,
Where kings the crown wear only of their virtues.

Sig. How bright must then be his!---This stroke is
sudden.

He was this morning well, when to the chase
Lord Tancred went.

Siff. 'Tis true. But at his years
Death gives short notice---drooping nature then,
Without a gust of pain to shake it, falls.
His death, my daughter, was that happy period
Which few attain. The duties of his day
Were all discharg'd, and gratefully enjoy'd
It's noblest blessings; calm, as evening skies,
Was his pure mind, and lighted up with hopes
That open heaven; when, for his last long sleep
Timely prepar'd, a lassitude of life,

A pleasing

10. TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

A pleasing weariness of mortal joy,
Fell on his soul, and down he sunk to rest.
O may my death be such!--he but one wish
Left unfulfill'd; which was to see Count Tancred--

Sig. To see Count Tancred!--pardon me, my lord--

Siff. For what, my daughter?--But, with such emotion,

Why did you start at mention of Count Tancred?

Sig. Nothing---I only hop'd the dying king
Might mean to make some gen'rous just provision
For this your worthy charge, this noble orphan.

Siff. And he has done it largely.---Leave me now---
I want some private conference with Lord Tancred.

S C E N E III.

SIFFREDI alone.

My doubts are but too true---If these old eyes
Can trace the marks of love, a mutual passion
Has seiz'd, I fear, my daughter and this prince;
My sovereign now---Should it be so---Ah there,
There lurks a brooding tempest, that may shake
My long concerted scheme, to settle firm
The public peace and welfare, which the king
Has made the prudent basis of his will---
Away! unworthy views! you shall not tempt me!
Nor int'rest nor ambition shall seduce
My fix'd resolve---Perish the selfish thought
Which our own good prefers to that of millions!---
He comes---my king---unconscious of his fortune.

S C E N E IV.

TANCRED. SIFFREDI.

Tan. My Lord Siffredi, in your looks I read,
Confirm'd, the mournful news that fly abroad
From tongue to tongue---We then, at last, have lost
The good old king?

Siff. Yes, we have lost a father!
The greatest blessing Heaven bestows on mortals,
And seldom found amidst these wilds of time.
A good, a worthy king!---Hear me, my Tancred,
And I will tell thee, in a few plain words,
How he deserv'd that best, that glorious title.
He lov'd his people, deem'd them all his children;
The good exalted, and depress'd the bad.
He spurn'd the flattery crew, with scorn rejected
Their

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 12

Their smooth advice that only means themselves,
Their schemes to aggrandize him into baseness.

Tan. A gen'ral face of grief o'erspreads the city.
I mark'd the people, as I hither came,
In crowds assembled, struck with silent sorrow,
And pouring forth the noblest praise of tears.
A mingled murmur run
Along the streets; and, from the lonely court
Of him who can no more assist their fortunes,
I saw the courtier-fry, with eager haste,
All hurrying to Constantia.

Siff. Noble youth!
I joy to hear from thee these just reflections,
Worthy of riper years---But if they seek
Constantia, trust me, they mistake their course.

Tan. How! is she not, my lord, the late king's
sister,
Heir to the crown of Sicily? The last
Of our fam'd Norman line, and now our queen?

Siff. Tancred, 'tis true; she is the late king's sister,
The sole surviving offspring of that tyrant
William THE BAD---so for his vices stil'd;
Who spilt much noble blood, and fore oppress'd
Th' exhausted land---But to return---
She is the late king's sister, born some months
After the tyrant's death, but not next heir.

Tan. You much surprize me---May I then presume
To ask who is?

Siff. Come nearer, noble Tancred,
Son of my care! I must, on this occasion,
Consult thy gen'rous heart; which, when conducted
By rectitude of mind and honest virtues,
Gives better counsel than the hoary head---
Then know, there lives a prince, here in Palermo,
The lineal offspring of our famous hero,
Roger the first.

Tan. Great heaven!--How far remov'd
From that our mighty founder?

Siff. His great grandson;
Sprung from his eldest son, who died untimely,
Before his father.

Tan. Ha! the prince you mean,
Is he not Manfred's son? The gen'rous, brave,
Unhappy Manfred! whom the tyrant William,
You just now mention'd, not content to spoil

12 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Of his paternal crown, threw into fetters,
And infamously murder'd.

Siff. Yes---the same.

Tan. But this prince-- --
Where has he lain conceal'd?

Siff. The late good king,
By noble pity mov'd, contriv'd to save him
From his dire father's unrelenting rage;
And had him rear'd in private, as became
His birth and hopes, with high and princely nurture.
Till now, too young to rule a troubled state,
By civil broils most miserably torn,
He in his safe retreat has lain conceal'd,
His birth and fortune to himself unknown;
But when the dying king to me entrusted,
As to the Chancellor of the realm, his will,
His successor he nam'd him.

Tan. Happy youth!
He then will triumph o'er his father's foes;
O'er haughty Osmond, and the tyrant's daughter.

Siff. Ay, that is what I dread---that heat of youth --
There lurks, I fear, perdition to the state.

I dread the horrors of rekindled war:
Tho' dead, the tyrant still is to be fear'd;
His daughter's party still is strong and numerous:
Her friend, Earl Osmond, Constable of Sicily,
Experienc'd, brave, high-born, of mighty interest.
Better the prince and princess should by marriage
Unite their friends, their int'rest, and their claims;
Then will the peace and welfare of the land
On a firm basis rise.

Tan. My lord Siffredi,
If by myself I of this prince may judge,
That scheme will scarce succeed---Your prudent age
In vain will counsel, if the heart forbid it---
But wherefore fear? the right is clearly his;
All Sicily will rouse, all faithful hearts
Will range themselves around Prince Manfred's son.
For me, I here devote me to the service
Of this young prince; I every drop of blood
Will lose with joy, with transport in his cause---
Pardon my warmth---but that, my lord, will never
To this decision come---Then find the prince;
Lose not a moment to awake in him
The royal soul. Perhaps he now desponding
Pines in a corner, and laments his fortune;

That

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 13

That in the narrow bounds of private life
He must confine his aims, those swelling virtues
Which from his noble father he inherits.

Siff. Perhaps, regardless, in the common bane
Of youth he melts, in vanity and love.
But if the seeds of virtue glow within him,
I will awake a higher sense, a love
That grasps the loves and happiness of millions.

Tan. Why that surmise? Or should he love, Siffredi,
I doubt not, it is nobly, which will raise
And animate his virtues---O permit me
To plead the cause of youth---Their virtue oft,
In pleasure's soft enchantment lull'd a-while,
Forgets itself; it sleeps and gayly dreams,
Till great occasion rouse it: then, all flame,
It walks abroad, with heighten'd soul and vigour,
And by the change astonishes the world.
Ev'n with a kind of sympathy, I feel
The joy that waits this prince; when all the powers,
Th' expanding heart can wish, of doing good,
All crowd at once upon him.

Siff. Hear him, immortal shades of his great fathers!--
Forgive me, sir, this trial of your heart:
Thou! thou art he!

Tan. Siffredi!--

Siff. Tancred, thou!
Thou art the man, of all the many thousands
That toil upon the bosom of this isle,
By heaven elected to command the rest;
To rule, protect them, and to make them happy!

Tan. Manfred my father! I the last support
Of the fam'd Norman line, that awes the world!
I! who this morning wander'd forth an orphan,
Outcast of all but thee, my second father!
Thus call'd to glory! to the first great lot
Of human kind!--O wonder-working hand,
That, in majestic silence, sways at will
The mighty movements of unbounded nature!
O grant me, heaven! the virtues to sustain
This awful burden of so many heroes!
Let me not be exalted into shame,

Set up the worthless pageant of vain grandeur!--

Meantime I thank the justice of the king,
Who has my right bequeath'd me. Thee, Siffredi,
I thank thee---O I ne'er enough can thank thee!--

Yes,

14 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Yes, thou hast been---thou art---shalt be my father!
Thou shalt direct my unexperienc'd years,
Shalt be the ruling head, and I the hand.

Siff. It is enough for me---to see my sovereign
Assert his virtues, and maintain his honour.

Tan. I think, my lord, you said the king committed
To you his will. I hope it is not clogg'd
With any base conditions, any clause
To tyrannize my heart, and to Constantia
Enslave my hand devoted to another.

The hint you just now gave of that alliance,
You must imagine, wakes my fear. But know,
In this alone I will not bear dispute;
Not ev'n from thee, Siffredi!--Let the council
Be strait assembled, and the will there open'd:
Thence issue speedy orders to convene,
This day, ere noon, the senate: where those barons,
Who now are in Palermo, will attend,
To pay their ready homage to their king.

Siff. I go, my liege. But once again permit me
To tell you--Now, now, is the trying crisis,
That must determine of your future reign.
O with heroic rigor watch your heart!
And to the sovereign duties of the king,
Th' unequal'd pleasures of a god on earth,
Submit the common joys, the common passions,
Nay, ev'n the virtues of the private man.

Tan. Of that no more. They not oppose, but aid;
Invigorate, cherish, and reward each other.

S C E N E V.

TANCRED alone.

Now, gen'rous Sigismunda, comes my turn
To shew my love was not of thine unworthy,
When fortune bade me blush to look to thee.
But what is fortune to the wish of love?
A miserable bankrupt!

Quick, let me find her! taste that highest joy,
Th' exalted heart can know, the mixt effusion
Of gratitude and love!--Behold, she comes!

S C E N E VI.

TANCRED. SIGISMUNDA.

Tan. My flutt'ring soul was all on wing to find thee,
My love! my Sigismunda!

Sig. O my Tancred!
Tell me what means this mystery and gloom

That

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 15

That low'rs around?---I fear some dark event
From the king's death to trouble our repose?
That tender calm we in the woods of Belmont
So happily enjoy'd---Explain this hurry,
What means it? Say.

Tan. It means that we are happy!
Beyond our most romantic wishes happy!

Sig. You but perplex me more.

Tan. It means, my fairest!
That thou art queen of Sicily; and I
The happiest of mankind! than monarch more!
Because with thee I can adorn my throne.
Manfred, who fell by tyrant William's rage,---
Fam'd Roger's lineal issue, was my father. [*Pausing.*

You droop, my love; dejected on a sudden;
You seem to mourn my fortune---The soft tear
Springs in thy eye---O let me kiss it off---
Why this, my Sigismunda?

Sig. Royal Tancred,
None at your glorious fortune can like me
Rejoice;---yet me alone, of all Sicilians,
It makes unhappy.

Tan. I should hate it then!
Should throw, with scorn, the splendid ruin from me!
No, Sigismunda, 'tis my hope with thee
To share it, whence it draws its richest value.

Sig. You are my sovereign---I at humble distance---

Tan. Thou art my queen! the sovereign of my soul!
The dear, the tender, gen'rous Sigismunda!
And would'st thou claim all goodness to thyself?
Can'st thou thy Tancred deem so dull of soul,
For the dead form of flattery and pomp,
The faithful joys of courts, to quit kind truth,
The cordial sweets of friendship and of love,
The life of life! my all, my Sigismunda!
I could upbraid thy fears, call them unkind,
Cruel, unjust, an outrage to my heart,
Did they not spring from love.

Sig. Think not, my Lord,
That to such vulgar doubts I can descend.
Your heart, I know, disdains the little thought
Of changing with the vain external change
Of circumstance and fortune.

But, ah! the hearts of kings are not their own.
Some high descended princess, who will bring

16. TANGRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

New pow'r and int'rest to your throne, demands
Your royal hand---perhaps Constantia---

Tan. She!

O name her not! Were I this moment free,
And disengag'd as he who never sigh'd
For matchless worth like thine, I should abhor
All thoughts of that alliance. Her fell father
Most basely murder'd mine;
And can'st thou deem me then so poorly tame,
So cool a traitor to my father's blood,
As from the prudent cowardice of state
E'er to submit to such a base proposal?
They whom just Heav'n has to a throne exalted,
To guard the rights and liberties of others,
What duty binds them to betray their own?
Or if indeed my choice must be directed
By views of public good, whom shall I chuse
So fit to grace, to dignify a crown,
And beam sweet mercy on a happy people,
As thee, my love? Whom place upon my throne
But thee, descended from the good Siffredi?
'Tis fit that heart be thine, which drew from him
Whate'er can make it worthy thy acceptance.

Sig. Cease, cease to raise my hopes above my duty.
Charm me no more, my Tancred!--O that we,
In those blest woods where first you won my soul,
Had pass'd our gentle days; far from the toil
And pomp of courts! Such is the wish of love;
And proud imperious honour calls you from me.
'Tis all in vain---You cannot hush a voice
That murmurs here---I must not be persuaded!

TANGRED kneeling.

Hear me, thou soul of all my hopes and wishes!
And witness, Heav'n! prime source of love and joy!
Not a whole warring world combin'd against me,
Shall ever shake my faith to Sigismunda!

[Trumpets and Acclamations heard.]

But, hark! the public voice to duties calls me,
Which with unwearied zeal I will discharge;
And thou, yes thou, shalt be my bright reward---
Yet---ere I go---to hush thy lovely fears,
Thy delicate objections---

[Writes his name.]

Take this blank,
Sign'd with my name, and give it to thy father:
Tell him 'tis my command, it be fill'd up

With

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 17

With a most strict and solemn marriage-contract.
How dear each tie! how charming to my soul!
That more unites me to my Sigismunda.

For thee and for my people's good to live,
Is all the bliss which sov'reign pow'r can give.

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ACT II. SCENE I.

SIFFREDI alone.

SO far 'tis well---the late king's will proceeds
Upon the plan I counsell'd; that prince Tancred
Shall make Constantia partner of his throne.

But how this mighty obstacle surmount,
Which love has thrown betwixt? Love, that disturbs
The schemes of wisdom still; that wing'd with passion,
Blind and impetuous in its fond pursuits,
Leaves the grey-headed reason far behind.

---My daughter owns

Her passion for the king; she trembling own'd it,
With pray'rs and tears, and tender supplications,
That almost shook my firmness---And this blank,
Which his rash fondness gave her, shews how much,
To what a wild extravagance he loves---

I see no means-- it foils my deepest thought---
How to controul this madness of the king,
That wears the face of virtue, and will thence
Disdain restraint, will from his gen'rous heart
Borrow new rage, ev'n speciously oppose
To reason reason---But it must be done.

---The crouding barons

Here summon'd to the palace, meet already,
To pay their homage, and confirm the will.
On a few moments hangs the public fate,
On a few hasty moments---Ha! there shone
A gleam of hope---Yes---with this very paper
I yet will save him---Necessary means
For good and noble ends can ne'er be wrong.
In that resistless, that peculiar case,
Deceit is truth and virtue---But how hold
This lion in the toil? O I will form it
Of such a fatal thread, twist it so strong
With all the ties of honour and of duty,
That his most desp'rate fury shall not break.

18 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

'The honest snare---To me, I know, 'tis ruin;
But safety to the public, to the king.

I will not reason more---No---'tis fix'd!

I here devote me for my prince and country;
Let them be safe, and let me nobly perish!

Behold Earl Osmond comes; without whose aid
My schemes are all in vain.

SCENE II.

OSMOND. SIFFREDI.

Of. My lord Siffredi,

I from the council hasten'd to Constantia,
And have accomplish'd what we there propos'd.
The princess to the will submits her claims:
She with her presence means to grace the senate,
And of your royal charge, young Tancred's hand,
Accept. Methought, besides,
I could discern that not from prudence merely
She to this choice submitted.

Siff. Noble Osmond,

You have in this done to the public great
And signal service. Yes; I must avow it;
This frank and ready instance of your zeal,
In such a trying crisis of the state,
When int'rest and ambition might have warp'd
Your views; I own, this truly gen'rous virtue
Upbraids the rashness of my former judgment.

Of. Siffredi, no---To you belongs the praise;
'Tis you, my lord, to whom the many thousands,
That by the barb'rous sword of civil war
Had fall'n inglorious, owe their lives---I blush to think
I have so long oppos'd the best good man
In Sicily---

To yours I join my hand; with you will own
No int'rest and no party but my country.
Nor is your friendship only my ambition:
There is a dearer name, the name of father,
By which I should rejoice to call Siffredi.
Your daughter's hand would to the public weal
Unite my private happiness.

Siff. My lord,

You have my glad consent. To be allied
To your distinguish'd family and merit,
I shall esteem an honour. From my soul
I here embrace Earl Osmond as my friend
And son.

Of.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 19

Of. You make him happy.
I from this moment vow myself the friend,
And zealous servant of Siffredi's house.

Enter an Officer belonging to the Court.

Officer to Siffredi.

The king, my lord, demands your speedy presence.

Siff. I will attend him straight. - Farewel, my lord;
The senate meets: there, a few moments hence,
I will rejoin you.

Of. There, my noble lord,
We will complete this salutary work;
Will there begin a new, auspicious æra.

SCENE III.

OSMOND alone.

Siffredi gives his daughter to my wishes---
But does she give herself? Gay, young, and flatter'd,
Perhaps engag'd, will she her youthful heart
Yield to my harsher, uncomplying years?
I am not form'd by flattery and praise,
By sighs and tears, and all the whining trade
Of love, to feed a fair one's vanity;
To charm at once and spoil her. These soft arts
Nor suit my years nor temper; the e be left
To boys and doating age. A prudent father,
By nature charg'd to guide and rule her choice,
Resigns his daughter to a husband's power,
Who, with superior dignity, with reason,
And manly tenderness, will ever love her;
Not first a kneeling slave, and then a tyrant.

SCENE IV.

Enter First OFFICER.

1st Off. My lord, the king is rob'd, the senate sits,
And waits your presence. [Exit OSM.]

A Shout. Enter Second OFFICER.

2d Off. I have not seen
So wild a tumult, the town is mad with transport;
Shew us our king, they cry, our Norman king,
The valiant Manfred's son, who lov'd the people.
In vain I told them, we had strict orders,
To keep for him himself, and for the barons,
All these apartments clear. Nought cou'd
Appease their storm of zeal, till at
The northern gate, that fronts the sea,
I promis'd them admittance.

1st Off. I do not marvel at their rage of joy!

20 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

He is a brave and amiable prince.
 When in my Lord Siffredi's house I liv'd,
 Ere by his favour I obtain'd this office,
 I there remember well the young Count Tancred.
 To see him and to love him were the same.
 He was so noble in his ways, yet still
 So affable and mild---- Well, well, old Sicily,
 Yet happy days await thee!

2d Off. Grant it Heav'n!

We have seen sad and troublous times enough.
 He is, they say, to wed the late king's sister,
 Constantia.

1st Off. Friend, of that I greatly doubt.
 Or I mistake, or Lord Siffredi's daughter,
 The gentle Sigismunda, has his heart.
 If one may judge by kindly cordial looks,
 And fond assiduous care to please each other,
 Most certainly they love-----O be they blest'd
 As they deserve! It were great pity aught
 Should part a matchless pair: the glory he,
 And she the blooming grace of Sicily!

2d Off. My Lord Rodolpho comes.

S C E N E V.

RODOLPHO, *from the Senate.*

Ro. My honest friends,
 You may retire. [Officers go out.]

A storm is in the wind.
 This will perplexes all. No, Tancred never
 Can stoop to these conditions, which at once
 Attack his rights, his honour, and his love. When
 He heard th' unjust, the base conditions of the will,
 Uncertain, toss'd in cruel agitation,
 He oft, methought, address'd himself to speak
 And interrupt Siffredi; who appear'd,
 With conscious haste, to dread that interruption,
 And hurry'd on---But hark! I hear a noise,
 As if th' assembly rose---Ha! Sigismunda,
 Oppress'd with grief, and wrapt in pensive sorrow,
 Passes along---

[Sigismunda and Attendants pass thro'
 the back scene, Laura advances.]

S C E N E VI.

RODOLPHO. LAURA.

Lau. Your high-prais'd friend, the king,
 Is false, most vilely false! The meanest slave
 Had shown a nobler heart; nor grossly thus,

By

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 21

By the first bait ambition spread, been gull'd.
 He Manfred's son! away! it cannot be!
 The son of that brave prince could ne'er betray
 Those rights so long usurp'd from his great fathers,
 Which he, this day, by such amazing fortune,
 Had just regain'd; he ne'er could sacrifice
 All faith, all honour, gratitude, and love,
 All in a moment---And for what? Why, truly,
 For kind permission, gracious leave, to sit
 On his own throne with tyrant William's daughter!

Ro. I stand amaz'd----You surely wrong him,
 Laura.

There must be some mistake.

Lau. There can be none!

Siffredi read his full and free consent,
 Before th' applauding senate. True indeed,
 A small remain of shame, a timorous weakness,
 Ev'n dastardly in falsehood, made him blush
 To act this scene in Sigismunda's eye,
 Who sunk beneath his perfidy and baseness.
 Hence, till to-morrow he adjourn'd the senate---
 To-morrow fix'd with infamy to crown him!
 Then, leading off his gay triumphant princess,
 He left the poor unhappy Sigismunda,
 To bend her trembling steps to that sad home
 His faithless vows will render hateful to her---
 He comes---Farewel---I cannot bear his presence!

S C E N E VII.

TANCRED. SIFFREDI. RODOLPHO.

TANCRED, entering, to SIFFREDI.

Avoid me, hoary traitor!--Go, Rodolpho,
 Give orders that all passages this way
 Be shut---Defend me from a hateful world,
 The bane of peace and honour---then return---

What! dost thou haunt me still? O monstrous
 insult!

Unparallel'd indignity! Just Heaven!
 Was ever king, was ever man so treated?
 So trampled into baseness!

Siff. Here, my liege,
 Here strike! I nor deserve, nor ask for mercy.

Tan. All, all but this I could have borne--but this!
 This murd'rous stroke that stabs my peace for ever!
 That wounds me there---there! where the human
 heart

Most exquisitely feels---

Siff.

22 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Siff. O bear it not,
My royal lord! appease on me your vengeance!

Tan. Did ever tyrant imagine aught so cruel!
The lowest slave that crawls upon the earth,
Robb'd of each comfort Heaven bestows on mortals,
On the bare ground, has still his virtue left,
The sacred treasures of an honest heart,
Which thou hast dar'd, with rash audacious hand,
And impious fraud, in me to violate---

Siff. Behold, my liege, that rash audacious hand,
Which not repents its crime---O glorious! happy!
If by my ruin I can save your honour.

Tan. Such honour I renounce! with sovereign
scorn

Greatly detest it, and its mean adviser!
Hast thou not dar'd beneath my name to shelter---
Beneath thy sovereign's name basely presum'd
To shield a lie? a lie! in public utter'd,
To all deluded Sicily? But know,
This poor contrivance is as weak as base.
What! marry her! Constantia! her! the daughter
Of the fell tyrant who destroy'd my father!
The very thought is madness! ere thou seest
The torch of Hymen light these hated nuptials,
Thou shalt behold Sicilia wrapt in flames,
Her cities raz'd, her vallies drench'd with slaughter---
Love set aside---my pride assumes the quarrel.
My honour now is up; in spite of thee,
A world combin'd against me, I will give
This scatter'd will in fragments to the winds;
Crush all who dare oppose me to the dust,
And heap perdition on thee!

Siff. Sir, 'tis just.
Exhaust on me your rage: I claim it all.
But for these public threats thy passion utters,
'Tis what thou canst not do!

Tan. I cannot! ha!
What shall arrest my vengeance? Who?

Siff. Thyself!

Tan. Away! dare not to justify thy crime!
That, that alone can aggravate it's horror;
Add insolence to insolence---Perhaps
May make my rage forget---

Siff. O let it burst
On this grey head devoted to thy service!
But when the storm has vented all it's fury,
Thou

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 23

Thou then must hear--nay more, I know, thou wilt--

Wilt hear the calm, yet stronger voice of reason.

Thou must reflect that there are other duties---

---Yes, thou must,

In calmer hours, divest thee of thy love,

These common passions of the vulgar breast,

This boiling heat of youth, and be a king!

The lover of thy people!

Tan. Yes, I will be a king, but not a slave!

In this will be a king! in this my people

Shall learn to judge how I will guard their rights,

When they behold me vindicate my own.

But have I, say, been treated like a king?--

Heavens! could I stoop to such outrageous usage,

I were a mean, a shameless wretch, unworthy

To wield a scepter in a land of slaves,

A soil abhorr'd of virtue, should belie

My father's blood, belie those very maxims,

At other times, you taught my youth---Siffredi!

[In a softened tone of voice.]

Siff. Behold, my prince, behold thy poor old servant,

Bent on his feeble knees, to beg, conjure thee,

With tears to beg thee, to controul thy passion,

And save thyself, thy honour, and thy people!

Kneeling with me, behold the many thousands

To thy protection trusted: fathers, mothers,

The sacred front of venerable age,

The tender virgin and the helpless infant; see them all,

Here at thy feet, conjuring thee to save them

From misery and war, from crimes and rapine!

Turn not away---Oh is there not some part,

In thy great heart, so sensible to kindness,

And gen'rous warmth, some nobler part, to feel

The prayers and tears of these, the mingled voice

Of Heaven and earth!

Tan. There is! and thou hast touch'd it.

Rise, rise, Siffredi---Oh! thou hast undone me,

Unkind old man!--O ill-entreated Tancred!

Which way so'er I turn, dishonour rears

Her hideous front---and misery and ruin!

Why have you rais'd this miserable conflict

Betwixt the duties of the king and man?

Set virtue against virtue?---But hold, my soul,

Thy

24 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Thy steady purpose---Toss'd by various passions,
To this eternal anchor keep-- There is,
Can be, no public without private virtue---
Then mark me well, observe what I command;
To-morrow, when the senate meets again,
Unfold the whole, unravel the deceit;---
Start not, my lord--- This must and shall be done!
Or here our friendship ends---Howe'er disguis'd,
Whatever thy pretence, thou art a traitor!

Siff. I should indeed deserve the name of traitor,
And ev'n a traitor's fate, had I so slightly,
From principles so weak, done what I did,
As e'er to disavow it---

Tan. Ha!---

Siff. My liege,
Expect not this---Tho' practis'd long in courts,
I have not so far learn'd their subtle trade,
To veer obedient with each gust of passion.
I honour thee, I venerate thy orders,
But honour more my duty. Nought on earth
Shall ever shake me from that solid rock,
Nor smiles nor frowns---

Tan. You will not then?

Siff. I cannot!

Tan. Away! begone!--O my Rodolpho, come,
And save me from this traitor!--Hence, I say!
---No reply! away!

S C E N E VIII.

TANCRED. RODOLPHO.

Ro. What can incense my prince so highly
Against his friend Siffredi?

Tan. Friend! Rodolpho?

When I have told thee what this friend has done,
How play'd me like a boy, a base-born wretch,
Who had not heart nor spirit! thou wilt stand
Amaz'd, and wonder at my stupid patience.

But this, my friend, these stormy gusts of pride
Are foreign to my love---'Till Sigismunda
Be disabus'd, my breast is tumult all.

Come then, my friend, and by the hand of Laura,
O let me steal a letter to her bosom---

Fly! my Rodolpho, fly! engage thy sister
To aid my letter, and this very evening
Secure an interview---I would not bear
This rack another day, not for my kingdom!

'Till

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 25

'Till then deep plung'd in solitude and shades,
I will not see the hated face of man.

Thought drives on thought, on passions passions roll;
Her smiles alone can calm my raging soul.

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ACT III. SCENE I.

SIGISMUNDA *alone, sitting in a disconsolate posture.*

AH tyrant prince! ah more than faithless Tancred!
Ungen'rous and inhuman in thy falsehood!---
How could'st thou be so cruel?---
Thus to revive my hopes, to sooth my love,
And call forth all its tenderness, then sink me
In black despair!---What unrelenting pride
Possess'd thy breast, that thou could'st bear unmov'd
To see me bent beneath a weight of shame?
How could'st thou drag me
In barb'rous triumph at a rival's car?
How make me witness to a sight of horror?
That hand, which, but a few short hours ago,
So wantonly abus'd my simple faith,
Before th' attesting world given to another!
Irrevocably given!---
Is there, kind Heaven! no constancy in man?
No steadfast truth, no gen'rous, fix'd affection,
That can bear up against a selfish world?
No, there is none---Even Tancred is inconstant!---
[*Rising.*]

My father comes---How, sunk in this disorder,
Shall I sustain his presence?

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI. SIGISMUNDA.

Siff. Sigismunda,

My dearest child! I grieve to find thee thus
A prey to tears. I know the powerful cause
From which they flow, and therefore can excuse them;
But not their wilful, obstinate continuance.
Come, wake to reason from this dream of love;
And shew the world thou art Siffredi's daughter.

Sig. Alas! I am unworthy of that name.

Siff. Thou art indeed to blame; thou hast too rashly
Engag'd thy heart, without a father's sanction.

But

26 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

But this I can forgive. The king has virtues
That plead thy full excuse; nor was I void
Of blame, to trust thee to these dangerous virtues.
Then dread not my reproaches. Tho' he blames,
Thy tender father pities more than blames thee.
Thou art my daughter still; and, if thy heart
Will now resume its pride, assert itself,
And greatly rise superior to this trial,
I to my warmest confidence again
Will take thee, and esteem thee more my daughter.

Sig. O you are gentler far than I deserve!---
It is, it ever was, my darling pride,
To bend my soul to your supreme commands,
Your wisest will; and tho', by love betray'd---
Alas! and punish'd too --I have transgress'd
The nicest bounds of duty, yet I feel
A sentiment of tenderness, a source
Of filial nature springing in my breast,
That, should it kill me, shall control this passion,
And make me all submission and obedience
To you, my honour'd lord, the best of fathers.

Siff. Come! let me take thee to a parent's heart;
There, with the kindly aid of my advice,
Ev'n with the dew of these paternal tears,
Revive and nourish this becoming spirit---
Then thou dost promise me, my Sigismunda---
Thy father stoops to make it his request---
Thou wilt resign thy fond presumptuous hopes,
And henceforth never more indulge one thought
That in the light of love regards the king?

Sig. Hopes I have none!---Those by this fatal day
Are blasted all---But from my soul to banish,
While weeping memory there retains her seat,
Thoughts which the purest bosom might have cherish'd,
Once my delight, now, even in anguish charming,
Is more, alas! my lord, than I can promise.

Siff. Absence and time, the soft'er of our passions,
Will conquer this. Meantime I hope from thee
A gen'rous, great effort---Must for thee,
To make thee blest, Sicilia be unhappy?
The king himself, lost to the nobler sense
Of manly praise, become the piteous hero
Of some soft tale, and rush on sure destruction?
Canst thou, my daughter, let the monstrous thought
Possess one moment thy perverted fancy?

Rouse

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 27

Rouse thee, for shame! and if a spark of virtue
Lies slumb'ring in thy soul, bid it blaze forth;
Nor sink unequal to the glorious lesson,
This day thy lover gave thee from his throne.

Sig. Ah, that was not from virtue!---Had, my father,
That been his aim, I yield to what you say;
'Tis powerful truth, unanswerable reason.
Then, then, with sad, but dutious resignation,
I had submitted, as became your daughter.
But, in that moment when my humbled hopes
Were to my duty reconcil'd, to raise them
To yet a fonder height than e'er they knew,
Then rudely dash them down---There is the sting!
The blasting view is ever present to me---
Why did you drag me to a fight so cruel?

Siff. It was a scene to fire thy emulation.

Sig. It was a scene of perfidy!---But know,
I will do more than imitate the king---
For he is false!---I, tho' sincerely pierc'd
With the best, truest passion, ever touch'd
A virgin's breast, here vow to Heav'n and you,
Tho' from my heart I cannot, from my hopes
To cast this prince-----What would you more, my
father?

Siff. Yes, one thing more-----thy father then is
happy---

Tho' by the voice of innocence and virtue
Absolv'd, we live not to ourselves alone:
A rigorous world, with peremptory sway,
Subjects us all, and ev'n the noblest most.
This world from thee, my honour and thy own,
Demands one step; a step, by which convinc'd
The king may see thy heart disdains to wear
A chain which his has greatly thrown aside.
But, above all, thou must root out for ever
From the king's breast the least remain of hope,
And henceforth make his mention'd love dishonour.
These things, my daughter, that must needs be done,
Can but this way be done---by the safe refuge,
The sacred shelter of a husband's arms.
And there is one---

Sig. Good Heav'ns! what means my lord?

Siff. One of illustrious family, high rank,
Yet still of higher dignity and merit,
Who can and will protect thee; one to awe
The king himself---Nay, hear me, Sigismunda---

28 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA

The noble Osmond courts thee for his bride,
And has my plighted word---This day---

Sig. [*Kneeling.*] My father!

Let me with trembling arms embrace thy knees!--

O if you ever wish'd to see me happy;

If e'er in infant years I gave you joy,

When, as I prattling twin'd around your neck,

You snatch'd me to your bosom, kiss'd my eyes,

And melting, said you saw my mother there;

O save me from that worst severity of fate!

O outrage not my breaking heart to that degree!--

Hear me, my dearest father! hear the voice

Of nature and humanity, that plead

As well as justice for me!--Not to chuse

Without your wise direction may be duty;

But still my choice is free---

And would you thus degrade me? Make me base!--

For such it were, to give my worthless person

Without my heart, an injury to Osmond,

The highest can be done---Let me, my lord---

Or I shall die, shall by the sudden change

Be to distraction shock'd---Let me wear out

My hapless days in solitude and silence,

At least---you cannot sure refuse me this---

Give me a little time---I will do all,

All I can do, to please you!

Siff. Rise, Sigismunda---Tho' you touch my heart,

Nothing can shake th' inexorable dictates

Of honour, duty, and determin'd reason.

Then, by the holy ties of filial love,

Resolve, I charge thee, to receive Earl Osmond,

As suits the man who is thy father's choice,

And worthy of thy hand---I go to bring him---

Sig. Spare me, my dearest father!

Siff. [*Aside.*] I must rush

From her soft grasp, or nature will betray me!--

O grant us, Heaven! that fortitude of mind,

Which listens to our duty, not our passions---

Quit me, my child!

Sig. You cannot, oh my father!

You cannot leave me thus!

Siff. Come hither, Laura.

Come to thy friend. Now shew thyself a friend.

Combat her weakness; dissipate her tears;

Cherish, and reconcile her to her duty.

SCENE

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 29

SCENE III.

SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

Sig. O woe on woe! distress'd by love and duty!
O ev'ry way unhappy Sigismunda!

Lau. Forgive me, madam, if I blame your grief.
How can you waste your tears on one so false?
Unworthy of your tenderness; to whom
Nought but contempt is due and indignation?

Sig. You know not half the horrors of my fate!
I might perhaps have learn'd to scorn his falsehood;
Nay, when the first sad burst of tears was past,
I might have rous'd my pride and scorn'd himself--
But 'tis too much, this greatest, last misfortune--
O whither shall I fly? Where hide me, Laura,
From the dire scene my father now prepares?

Lau. What thus alarms you, madam?

Sig. Can it be?
Can I---ah no!--at once give to another
My violated heart; in one wild moment?
He brings Earl Osmond to receive my vows!
O dreadful change! for Tancred, haughty Osmond!

Lau. Now, on my soul, 'tis what an outrag'd heart,
Like thine, should wish!--I should, by Heav'n's,
esteem it.

Most exquisite revenge!

Sig. Revenge on whom?
On my own heart, already but too wretched!

Lau. On him! this Tancred! who has basely sold,
For the dull form of despicable grandeur,
His faith, his love!--At once a slave and tyrant!

Sig. O rail at me, at my believing folly,
My vain ill-founded hopes; but spare him, Laura!

Lau. Who rais'd these hopes? Who triumphs o'er
that weakness?

Pardon the word--You greatly merit him;
Better than him, with all his giddy pomp!
You rais'd him by your smiles when he was nothing!
Where is your woman's pride? That guardian spirit
Given us to dash the peridy of man?
Ye pow'rs! I cannot bear the thought with patience--
Before the public thus, before your father,
By an irrevocable solemn deed,
With such inhuman scorn, to throw you from him!
To give his faithless hand yet warm from thine,
With complicated meannells, to Constantia!
And to compleat his crime, when thy weak limbs

30 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Could scarce support thee, then, of thee regardless,
To lead her off!

Sig. That was indeed a fight
To poison love! to turn it into rage
And keen contempt!---What means this stupid weakness
That hangs upon me? Hence, unworthy tears!
Disgrace my cheek no more! no more, my heart,
For one so coolly false, or meanly fickle---dare to suggest
The least excuse---Yes, traitor, I will wring
Thy pride, will turn thy triumph to confusion!
I will not pine away my days for thee,
Sighing to brooks and groves; while, with vain pity,
You in a rival's arms lament my fate---
No! let me perish! ere I tamely be
That soft, that patient, gentle Sigismunda,
Who can console her with the wretched boast,
She was for thee unhappy!---If I am,
I will be nobly so!---Sicilia's daughters
Shall wond'ring see in me a great example
Of one who punish'd her ill-judging heart,
Who made it bow to what it most abhorr'd!
Crush'd it to misery! for having thus
So lightly listen'd to a worthless lover!

Lau. At last it mounts! the kindling pride of virtue!
Trust me, the marriage will embitter his---

Sig. O may the furies light his nuptial torch!
Be it accurs'd as mine! for the fair peace,
The tender joys of Hymeneal love,
May jealousy awak'd, and fell remorse,
Pour all their fiercest venom through his breast!---
Where the fates lead, and blind revenge, I follow!---
Let me not think---By injur'd love! I vow,
Thou shalt, base prince! perfidious and inhuman!
Thou shalt behold me in another's arms!
In his thou hatest!---Osmond's!

Lau. That will grind
His heart with secret rage!---Aye, that will sting
His soul to madness! set him up a terror,
A spectacle of woe to faithless lovers!---
Your cooler thought, besides, will of the change
Approve, and think it happy. Noble Osmond
From the same stock with him derives his birth,
First of Sicilian barons, prudent, brave,
Of strictest honour, and by all rever'd---

Sig. Talk not of Osmond, but perfidious Tancred!
Rail at him, rail! invent new names of scorn!

Assist

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 31

Affist me, Laura; lend my rage fresh fuel;
Support my staggering purpose, which already
Begins to fail me---Ah my vaunts how vain!
How have I ly'd to my own heart!---Alas!
My tears return, the mighty flood o'erwhelms me!
Ten thousand crowding images distract
My tortur'd thought---And is it come to this?
Our hopes? Our vows?
To make each other happy?---Come to this!

Lau. If thy own peace and honour cannot keep
Thy resolution fix'd, yet, Sigismunda,
O think how deeply, how beyond retreat,
Thy father is engag'd.

Sig. Ah wretched weakness!
And have I then no tears for thee, my father?
Can I forget thy cares, from helpless years,
Thy tenderness for me? Shall I, for these,
Repay thy stooping venerable age,
With shame, disquiet, anguish and dishonour?
It must not be!---Thou first of angels! come,
Sweet filial piety! and firm my breast!
Yes, let one daughter to her fate submit,
Be nobly wretched---but her father happy!---
Laura!---they come!---O Heav'ns! I cannot stand!
The horrid trial!---Open, open, earth!
And hide me from their view!

Lau. Madam!

S C E N E IV.

SIFREDI. OSMOND. SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

Siff. My daughter,
Behold my noble friend who courts thy hand,
And whom to call my son I shall be proud.

Os. Think not, I presume,
Madam, on this your father's kind consent
To make me bless'd. I love you from a heart,
That seeks your good superior to my own;
And will, by ev'ry art of tender friendship,
Consult your dearest welfare---May I hope,
Yours does not disavow your father's choice?

Sig. I am a daughter, Sir, and have no pow'r
O'er my own heart---I die---Support me, Laura. [*Faints.*]

Siff. Help!---Bear her off---She breathes---My
daughter!

Sig. Oh!---
Forgive my weakness---Soft---My Laura, lead me
To my apartment.

32 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Siff. Pardon me, my Lord,
If, by this sudden accident alarm'd,
I leave you for a moment.

SCENE V.
OSMOND alone.

Let me think---
What can this mean?—Is it to me aversion?
Or is it, as I fear'd, she loves another?
Ha!—Yes—Perhaps the king, the young Count
Tancred!

They were bred up together—Surely that,
That cannot be—Has he not giv'n his hand,
In the most solemn manner, to Constantia?
Does not his crown depend upon the deed?
What is it then?—I care not what it be.
She must be mine—She is—If yet her heart
Consent not to my happiness, her duty,
Join'd to my tender cares, will gain so much
Upon her gen'rous nature—That will follow.

The man of sense, who acts a prudent part,
Not flatter'ing steals, but forms himself the heart.

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ACT IV. SCENE I.

The Garden belonging to SIFFREDI's House.

SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA, with a Letter in her Hand.

TIS done!—I am a slave!—The fatal vow
Has pass'd my lips!—Methought in those sa-
moments

The tombs around, the fairs, the darken'd altar,
And all the trembling shrines with horror shook.

But here is still new matter of distress.

O Tancred, cease to persecute me more!—

O grudge me not some calmer state of woe?

Some quiet gloom to shade my hopeless days,

Where I may never hear of love and thee!—

Has Laura too conspir'd against my peace?

Why did you take this letter?—Bear it back—

(Giving her the letter.)

I will not court new pain.

Lau. Madam, Rodolpho

Neg'd me so much, nay, ev'n with tears conjur'd me

But this once more to serve th' unhappy king—
 For such he said he was—that tho' enrag'd,
 Equal with thee, at his inhuman falsehood,
 I could not to my brother's fervent prayers
 Refuse this office—Read it—His excuses
 Will only more expose his falsehood.

Sig. No:

It suits not Osmond's wife to read one line
 From that contagious hand—She knows too well!

Lau. He paints him out distress'd beyond expression,
 Ev'n on the point of madness. Wild as winds,
 And fighting seas, he raves. His passions mix,
 With ceaseless rage, all in each giddy moment.
 He dies to see thee, and to clear his faith.

Sig. Save me from that!—That would be worse
 than all!

Lau. I but report my brother's words; who then
 Began to talk of some dark imposition,
 That had deceiv'd us all: when, interrupted,
 We heard your father and Earl Osmond near,
 As summon'd to Constantia's court they went.

Sig. Ha!—Imposition!—Well!—If I am doom'd
 To be, o'er all my sex, the wretch of love,
 In vain I would resist—Give me the letter—
 To know the worst is some relief—Alas!
 It was not thus, with such dire palpitations,
 That, Tancred, once I us'd to read thy letters.—
(Attempting to read the Letter, but gives it to Laura.)
 Ah fond remembrance blinds me!—Read it, Laura.

LAURA reads,

DELIVER me, Sigismunda, from that most exquisite misery which a faithful heart can suffer—
 To be thought base by her, from whose esteem even
 virtue borrows new charms. When I submitted to my
 cruel situation, it was not falsehood you beheld, but
 an excess of love. Rather than endanger that, I for
 a while gave up my honour. Every moment, till I see
 you, stabs me with severer pangs than real guilt itself
 can feel. Let me then conjure you to meet me in the
 garden, towards the close of the day, when I will explain
 this mystery. We have been most inhumanly abused;
 and that by the means of the very paper which I gave you,
 from the warmest sincerity of love, so assure to you the heart
 and hand of **TANCRED.**

Sig. There, Laura, there, the dreadful secret
 sprung! That

34 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

That paper! ah that paper! it suggests
 A thousand horrid thoughts—I to my father
 Gave it; and he perhaps—I dare not cast
 A look that way—If yet indeed you love me,
 O blast me not, kind Tancred, with the truth!
 O pitying keep me ignorant for ever!
 What strange, peculiar misery is mine!
 Reduc'd to wish the man I love were false!
 Why was I hurry'd to a step so rash?
 Repairless woe?—I might have waited, sure,
 A few short hours—No duty that forbade—
 I ow'd thy love that justice; till this day
 Thy love an image of all perfect goodness!
 A beam from Heaven that glow'd with ev'ry virtue!
 And have I thrown this prize of life away?
 The piteous wreck of one distracted moment?
 Ah curs'd, ah blind revenge!—On ev'ry hand
 I was betray'd—You, Laura, too, betray'd me!—

Lau. Who, who but he, whate'er he writes, be-
 tray'd you?

For once I will with you suppose, that his agreement
 To the king's will was forg'd---Tho' forg'd by
 whom?

Your father scorns the crime---Yet what avails it?
 This, if it clears his truth, condemns his spirit.
 A youthful king, by love and honour fir'd,
 Patient to sit on his insulted throne,
 And let an outrage, of so high a nature,
 Unpunish'd pass, uncheck'd, uncontradicted---
 O 'tis a meanness equal ev'n to falsehood!

Sig. Laura, no more---We have already judg'd
 Too largely without knowledge.---

Yes, I begin to feel a sad presage:

I am undone, from that eternal source

Of human woes---the judgment of the passions.

But what have I to do with these excuses?

O cease, my treach'rous heart, to give them room!

It suits not thee to plead a lover's cause;

Ev'n to lament my fate is now dishonour.

Nought now remains, but, with relentless purpose,

To thun all interviews, all clearing up

Of this dark scene; to wrap myself in gloom,

In solitude and shades; there to devour

The silent sorrows ever swelling here;

And since I must be wretched---for I must---

To

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 35

To claim the mighty misery myself,
Engrofs it all, and spare a hapless father.
Hence, let me fly!--The hour approaches--

Lau. Madam,
Behold he comes---The king---

Sig. Heavens! how escape?

No---I will stay---This one last meeting---Leave me.

SCENE II.

TANCRED. SIGISMUNDA.

Tan. And are these long hours of torture past?
My life! my Sigismunda!

[Throwing himself at her feet.]

Sig. Rise, my lord.

To see my sovereign thus no more becomes me.

Tan. O let me kiss the ground on which you tread!
Let me exhale my soul in softest transport!

Since I again embrace my Sigismunda! *[Rising.]*

Unkind! how couldst thou ever deem me false?
How thus dishonour love?—After the vows,
The fervent truth, the tender protestations,
Which mine has often pour'd, to let thy breast,
Whate'er th' appearance was, admit suspicion?

Sig. How! when I heard myself your full consent
To the late king's so just and prudent will?
Heard it before you read, in solemn senate?
When I beheld you give your royal hand
To her, whose birth and dignity, of right,
Demands that high alliance? Yes, my lord,
You have done well. The man, whom Heaven ap-
points

To govern others, should himself first learn
To bend his passions to the sway of reason.
In all you have done well; but when you bade
My humbled hopes look up to you again,
And sooth'd with wanton cruelty my weakness—
That too was well—My vanity deserv'd
The sharp rebuke.

Tan. Chide on, chide on. Thy soft reproaches
now,

Instead of wounding, only soothe my fondness.
No, no, thou charming comfort of my soul!
I never lov'd thee with such faithful ardor,
As in that cruel miserable moment you thought me
false.

It was thy barb'rous father, Sigismunda,

Who

36 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Who caught me in the toil. He turn'd that paper,
Meant for th' assuring bond of nuptial love,
To ruin it for ever; he, he wrote
That forg'd consent, you heard, beneath my name.
Had he not been thy father—Ha! my love!
You tremble, you grow pale.

Sig. Oh leave me, Tancred!

Tan. No!—Leave thee!—Never! never! till you
My heart at peace, till these dear lips again [set
Pronounce thee mine! without thee I renounce
Myself, my friends, the world—Here on this hand—

Sig. My lord, forget that hand, which never now
Can be to thine united—

Tan. Sigismunda!

What dost thou mean? Thy words, thy look, thy
manner,

Seem to conceal some horrid secret—Heavens!—
No—That was wild—Distraction fires that thought!—

Sig. Enquire no more—I never can be thine.

Tan. What, who shall interpose? who dares at-
To brave the fury of an injur'd king? [tempt

Who, ere he sees thee ravish'd from his hopes,
Will wrap all blazing Sicily in flames—

Sig. In vain your power, my lord---This fatal
Join'd to my father's unrelenting will, [error,
Has plac'd an everlasting bar betwixt us---
I am---Earl Osmond's--wife.

Tan. Earl Osmond's wife---

[After a long pause, during which they look at
one another with the highest agitation and
most tender distress.]

Heavens! did I hear thee right? What! marry'd!
Lost to thy faithful Tancred! lost for ever! [marry'd!
Couldst thou then doom me to such matchless woe,
Without so much as hearing me?---Distraction!---
Alas! what hast thou done? Ah, Sigismunda!

Thy rash credulity has done a deed
Which, of two happiest lovers that e'er felt
The blissful power, has made two finish'd wretches!
But---Madness!---Sure, thou know'st it cannot be!
This hand is mine! a thousand thousand vows---

S C E N E III.

TANCRED. OSMOND. SIGISMUNDA.

OSMOND. (Snatching her Hand from the King.)

Madam, this hand, by the most solemn rites,

A little

A little hour ago, was given to me;
And did not sovereign honour now command me,
Never but with my life to quit my claim,
I would renounce it---thus!

Tan. Ha! who art thou?
Presumptuous man!

Sig. [*Aside.*] Where is my father? Heavens!

Of. One thou shouldst better know---Yes---View
me---One!

Who can and will maintain his rights and honour,
Against a faithless prince, an upstart king,
Whose first base deed is what a harden'd tyrant
Would blush to act.

Tan. Insolent Osmond! know,
This upstart king will hurl confusion on thee,
And all who shall invade his sacred rights,
Prior to thine---thine founded on compulsion,
On infamous deceit---I will annul,
By the high power with which the laws invest me,
Those guilty forms in which you have entrap'd
My Queen betroth'd; who has my heart, my hand,
And shall partake my throne---If, haughty lord,
If this thou didst not know, then know it now!
And know besides, that, having told thee this,
Shouldst thou but think to urge thy treason further---
Thy life shall answer for it!

Of. Ha! my life!--

It moves my scorn to hear thy empty threats.
When was it that a Norman baron's life
Became so vile, as on the frown of kings
To hang?---Of that, my lord, the law must judge:
Or, if the law be weak, my guardian sword---

Tan. Dare not touch it, traitor! lest my rage
Break loose, and do a deed that misbecomes me.

S C E N E IV.

TANCRED. SIFFREDI. OSMOND.

SIFFREDI, entering.

My gracious lord! what is it I behold?
My sovereign in contention with his subjects?
Surely this house deserves from Royal Tancred
A little more regard, than to be made
A scene of trouble and unseemly jars.
Heavens! can your Highness
From your exalted character descend,

Unkindly

38 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Unkindly to disturb the sweet repose,
The sanctimonious peace of families;
For which alone the free-born race of men
To government submit?

Tan. My Lord Siffredi,
Spare thy rebuke. The duties of my station
Are not to me unknown---But thou, old man,
Dost thou not blush to talk of rights invaded?
And of our best, our dearest bliss disturb'd?
Thou! who with more than barb'rous perfidy
Hast trampled all allegiance, justice, truth,
Humanity itself, beneath thy feet?
Thou know'st thou hast---I could, to thy confusion,
Return thy hard reproaches; but I spare thee
Before this lord, for whose ill-sorted friendship
Thou hast most basely sacrific'd thy daughter.
Farewel, my lord!--For thee, Lord Constable,
Who dost presume to lift thy surly eye
To my soft love, my gentle Sigismunda,
I once again command thee, on thy life,---
Yes---chew thy rage, but mark me---on thy life,
No further urge thy arrogant pretensions!

S C E N E V.

SIFFREDI. OSMOND.

Os. Ha! arrogant pretensions! Heaven and earth!
What! arrogant pretensions to my wife?
My wedded wife! where are we? In a land
Of civil rule, of liberty and laws?---
Not on my life pursue them!--Giddy prince!
My life disdains thy nod. It is the gift
Of parent Heaven, who gave me too an arm,
A spirit to defend it against tyrants.
Mine is a common cause. My arm shall guard,
Mix'd with my own, the rights of each Sicilian;
Ere to thy tyrant rage they fall a prey,
I shall find means to shake thy tott'ring throne,
And crush thee in the ruins!--

Siff. Lord Constable,
Let us be steadfast in the right; but let us
Act with cool prudence, and with manly temper,
As well as manly firmness. Remember that my house
Protects my daughter still; and ere I saw her
Thus ravish'd from us, by the arm of power,
This hand should act the Roman father's part.
Fear not; be temp'rate; all will yet be well.

I know

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 39

I know the king. At first his passions burst
Quick as the lightning's flash: but in his breast
Honour and justice dwell---Trust me, to reason
He will return.

Os. He will!--By Heavens, he shall!--
You know the king---I wish, my Lord Siffredi,
That you had deign'd to tell me all you knew---
And would you have me wait, with duteous patience,
Till he return to reason? Ye just powers!
When he has planted on our necks his foot,
And trod us into slaves; when his vain pride
Is cloy'd with our submission;
No, no, my lord!--There is a nobler way
To teach the blind oppressive fury reason:
Oft has the lustre of avenging steel
Unseal'd her stupid eyes---The sword is reason.

S C E N E VI.

SIFFREDI. OSMOND. RODOLPHO, *with Guards,*

Ro. My Lord High Constable of Sicily,
In the King's name, and by his special order,
I here arrest you prisoner of state.

Os. What king? I know no king of Sicily---
Unless he be the husband of Constantia.

Ro. Then know him now---Behold his royal orders
To bear you to the castle of Palermo.

Siff. Let the big torrent foam its madness off.
Submit, my lord---No castle long can hold
Our wrongs---This, more than friendship or alliance,
Confirms me thine; this binds me to thy fortunes,
By the strong tie of common injury,
Which nothing can dissolve.---I grieve, Rodolpho,
To see the reign, in such unhappy sort,
Begin.

Os. The reign! the usurpation call it!
This meteor-king may blaze awhile, but soon
Must spend his idle terrors---Sir, lead on---
Farewel, my lord---More than my life and fortune,
Remember well, is in your hands---My honour!

Siff. Our honour is the same. My son, farewel---
We shall not long be parted. On these eyes
Sleep shall not shed his balm, till I behold thee
Restor'd to freedom, or partake thy bonds.

Ev'n noble courage is not void of blame,
Till nobler patience sanctifies it's flame.

40 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

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ACT V. SCENE I.

SIFFREDI *alone.*

THE prospect low'rs around. I found the king,
 Tho' calm'd a little, with subsiding tempest,
 As suits his gen'rous nature, yet in love
 Abated nought, most ardent in his purpose;
 Inexorably fix'd, whate'er the risque,
 To claim my daughter, and dissolve this marriage—
 I have embark'd, upon a perilous sea,
 A mighty treasure. Here, the rapid youth,
 Th' impetuous passions of a lover king,
 Check my bold course; and there, the jealous pride,
 Th' impatient honour of a haughty lord
 Of the first rank, in int'rest and dependants
 Near equal to the king, forbid retreat.
 My honour too, the same unchang'd conviction,
 That these my measures were, and still remain
 Of absolute necessity, to save
 The land from civil fury, urge me on.
 But how proceed? —I only faster rush
 Upon the desp'rate evils I would shun.
 Whate'er the motive be, deceit, I fear,
 And harsh, unnatural force, are not the means
 Of public welfare, or of private bliss—
 Bear witness, Heaven! Thou mind-inspecting Eye!
 My breast is pure. I have preferr'd my duty,
 The good and safety of my fellow-subjects,
 To all those views that fire the selfish race
 Of men, and mix them in eternal broils.

Enter an Officer belonging to SIFFREDI.

Offi. My lord, a man of noble port, his face
 Wrapt in disguise, is earnest for admission.

Siff. Go, bid him enter— (*Officer goes out*)

Ha! wrapt in disguise!
 And at this late unseasonable hour!
 When o'er the world tremendous midnight reigns;
 By the dire gloom of raging tempest doubled—

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI. OSMOND, *discovering himself.*

Siff. What! ha! Earl Osmond, you? Welcome,
 once more,

To this glad roof!—But why in this disguise?

Would

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 411

Would I could hope the king exceeds his promise!
I have his faith soon as to-morrow's sun
Shall gild Sicilia's cliffs, you shall be free—
Has some good angel turn'd his heart to justice?

Of. It is not by the favour of Count Tancred
That I am here. As much I scorn his favour,
As I defy his tyranny and threats—
Our friend Goffredo, who commands the castle,
On my parole, ere dawn, to render back
My person, has permitted me this freedom.
Know then, the faithless outrage of to-day,
By him committed whom you call the king,
Has rous'd Constantia's court. Our friends, the friends
Of virtue, justice, and of public faith,
Ripe for revolt, are in high ferment all.
I thence of you, as guardian of the laws,
As guardian of this will to you entrusted,
Desire, nay more, demand, your instant aid,
To see it put in vigorous execution. (re-enter

Siff. You cannot doubt, my lord, of my concurrence.
Who more than I have labour'd this great point?
'Tis my own plan. And, if I drop it now,
I should be justly branded with the shame
Of rash advice, or despicable weakness.
But let us not precipitate the matter.

Constantia's friends are numerous and strong;
Yet Tancred's, trust me, are of equal force.
E'er since the secret of his birth was known,
The people all are in a tumult hurl'd
Of boundless joy, to hear there lives a prince
Of mighty Guiscard's line. Numbers, besides,
Of powerful barons, who at heart had pin'd,
To see the reign of their renown'd forefathers,
Won by immortal deeds of matchless valour,
Pass from the gallant Normans to the Suevi,
Will, with a kind of rage, espouse his cause—
'Tis so, my lord—be not by passion blinded—
'Tis surely so—O if our prating virtue

Dwells not in words alone—O let us join,
My generous Osmond, to avert these woes,
And yet sustain our tottering Norman kingdom!

Of. But how, Siffredi? How?—If by soft means
We can maintain our rights, and save our country,
May his unnatural blood first stain the sword,
Who, with un pitying fury, first shall draw it!

42 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Siff. I have a thought---The glorious work be thine.
But it requires an awful flight of virtue,
Above the passions of the vulgar breast,
And thence from thee I hope it, noble Osmond---
Suppose my daughter, to her God devoted,
Were plac'd within some convent's sacred verge,
Beneath the dread protection of the altar---

Os. Ere then, by Heavens! I would turn whining
monk

Myself, and pray incessant for the tyrant's safety!--
What! how! because an insolent invader,
A sacrilegious tyrant, demands my wife;
That I shall thus betray the common cause
Of human kind, and tamely yield her up,
Ev'n in the manner you propose--O then
I were supremely vile! degraded! sham'd!
The scorn of manhood! and abhorr'd of honour!

Siff. There is, my lord, an honour, the calm child
Of reason, of humanity and mercy,
Superior far to this punctilious demon,
That singly minds itself, and oft embroils
With proud barbarian niceties the world!

Os. My lord, my lord! --I cannot brook your
prudence---

It holds a pulse unequal to my blood---
Unblemish'd honour is the flower of virtue!
The vivifying soul! and he who flights it
Will leave the other dull and lifeless dross.

Siff. No more--you are too warm.

Os. You are too cool.

Siff. Too cool, my lord?--I were indeed too cool,
Not to resent this language, and to tell thee--
I wish Earl Osmond were as cool as I
To his own selfish bliss--ay, and as warm
To that of others--But of this no more--
My daughter is thy wife--I gave her to thee,
And will against all force maintain her thine.
But think not I will catch thy headlong passions,
Whirl'd in a blaze of madness o'er the land;
Or, till the last extremity compel me,
Risque the dire means of war--The king, to-morrow,
Will set you free; and, if by gentle means
He does not yield my daughter to thy arms,
And wed Constantia, as the will requires,

Why

Why then expect me on the side of justice—
Let that suffice,

Of. It does—Forgive my heat.
My rankled mind, by injuries inflam'd,
May be too prompt to take and give offence.

Siff. 'Tis pass'd—Your wrongs, I own, may well
transport

The wisest mind—But henceforth, noble Osmond,
Do me more justice; honour more my truth,
Nor mark me with an eye of squint suspicion—
These jars apart—You may repose your soul
On my firm faith and unremitting friendship.
Of that I sure have given exalted proof,
And the next sun we see shall prove it further—
Return, my son, and from your friend Goffredo
Release your word. There try, by soft repose,
To calm your breast.

Of. Bid the vex'd ocean sleep,
Swept by the pinions of the raging North—
But your frail age, by care and toil exhausted,
Demands the balm of all-repairing rest. (*skies,*

Siff. Soon as to-morrow's dawn shall streak the
I, with my friends in solemn state assembled,
Will to the palace, and demand your freedom.
Then by calm reason, or by higher means,
The king shall quit his claim, and in the face
Of Sicily, my daughter shall be yours.
Farewell.

Of. My lord, good-night.

S C E N E III.

OSMOND alone. (*After a long pause.*)

I like him not—

Yes—I have mighty matter of suspicion.
'Tis plain—I see it—lurking in his breast;
My honour is not safe, while here my wife
Remains—Who knows but he this very night
May bear her to some convent, as he mention'd—
The king too—tho' I smother'd up my rage,
I mark'd it well—will set me free to-morrow.
Why not to-night? He has some dark design—
By Heavens! he has—I am abus'd most grossly;
Made the vile tool of this old statesman's schemes.
I will not wait his crawling, timid motions:
I will convince him that Earl Osmond never
Was form'd to be his dupe—I'll bear her off

44 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

This night, and lodge her in a place of safety.
I have a trusty band, that waits not far---
Hence! let me lose no time---one rapid moment
Should ardent form, at once, and execute
A bold design.---The mine is laid,
And only wants my kindling touch to spring.

SCENE IV.

SIGISMUNDA'S Apartment.

SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

Lau. Heavens! 'tis a fearful night!--

Sig. Ah! the black rage
Of midnight tempest, or th' assuring smiles
Of radiant morn, are equal all to me.
Nought now has charms or terrors to my breast,
The feat of stupid woe!--Leave me, my Laura.
Kind rest, perhaps, may hush my woes a little--
Oh for that quiet sleep that knows no morning!

Lau. Madam, indeed I know not how to go.
Indulge my fondness--Let me watch a while
By your sad bed, till these dread hours shall pass.

Sig. Alas! what is the toil of elements,
This idle perturbation of the sky,
To what I feel within!--Oh that the fires
Of pitying Heaven would point their fury here!
Good-night, my dearest Laura!

Lau. Oh! I know not
What this oppression means--but 'tis with pain,
With tears, I can persuade myself to leave you--
Well then--Good-night, my dearest Sigismunda!

SCENE V.

Sig. And am I then alone?--The most undone,
Most wretched being now beneath the cope
Of this affrighting gloom that wraps the world!--
I said I did not fear--Ah me! I feel
A shivering horror run through all my powers!
O I am nought but tumult, fears and weakness!
And yet how idle fear when hope is gone,
Gone, gone for ever!--What shall I do?
How pass this dreadful night, so big with terror?
Here, with the midnight shades, here will I sit,

(Sitting down.)

A prey to dire despair, and ceaseless weep
The hours away--Bless me!--I heard a noise--

(Starting up.)

No--I mistook--Nothing but silence reigns

And

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 45

And awful midnight round—Again!—O Heavens!
My lord the King!

SCENE VI.

TANCRED. SIGISMUNDA.

Tan. Be not alarm'd, my love!

Sig. My royal lord! why at this midnight hour,
How came you hither?

Tan. By that secret way
My love contriv'd, when we, in happier days,
Us'd to devote these hours, so much in vain,
To vows of love and everlasting friendship.

Sig. Why will you thus persist to add new stings
To her distress, who never can be thine?
O fly me! fly! you know—

Tan. I know too much.
O how I could reproach thee, Sigismunda!
Pour out my injur'd soul in just complaints!
But now the time permits not, these swift moments—
I told thee how thy father's artifice
Forc'd me to seem perfidious in thy eyes.
E'er since—A dreadful interval of care!—
My thoughts have been employ'd, not without hope,
How to defeat Siffredi's barb'rous purpose.
But thy credulity has ruin'd all,
Thy rash, thy wild—I know not what to name it—
Oh, it has prov'd the giddy hopes of man
To be delusion all, and sick'ning folly!

Sig. Ah, gen'rous Tancred! ah, thy truth destroys
me!

Yes, yes, 'tis I, 'tis I alone am false!
My hasty rage, join'd to my tame submission,
More than the most exalted filial duty
Could e'er demand, has dash'd our cup of fate
With bitterness unequal'd—But, alas!
What are thy woes to mine?—To mine! Just Hea-
ven!—

Now is thy turn of vengeance—hate, renounce me!
O leave me to the fate I well deserve,
To sink in hopeless misery! at least,
Try to forget the worthless Sigismunda!

Tan. Forget thee! no! thou art my soul itself!
I have no thought, no hope, no wish but thee!
Ah, how forget thee!—Much must be forgot,
Ere Tancred can forget his Sigismunda!

Sig. But you, my lord, must make that great effort.
Tan.

46 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Tan. Can Sigismunda make it?—

Sig. Ah! I know not
With what success—But all that feeble woman,
And love-entangled reason can perform,
I, to the utmost, will exert to do it.

Tan. Fear not—'Tis done!—If thou canst form the
thought,
Success is sure—I am forgot already!—

Sig. Ah, Tancred!—But, my lord, respect me
more.

Think who I am—What can you now propose?

Tan. To claim the plighted vows which Heaven
has heard;

To vindicate the rights of holy love,
By faith and honour bound, to which compar'd
These empty forms, which have ensnar'd thy hand,
Are impious guile, abuse, and profanation—

Sig. Honour, my lord, is much too proud to catch
At nice distinctions.

These for th' unfeeling vulgar may do well:

But those, whose souls are by the nicer rule

Of virtuous delicacy nobly sway'd,

Stand at another bar than that of laws.

Then cease to urge me—Since I am not born

To that exalted fate to be your queen—

Or, yet a dearer name—to be your wife!—

I am the wife of an illustrious lord,

Of your own princely blood; and what I am,

I will, with proper dignity, remain.

Retire, my royal lord—There is no means

To cure the wounds this fatal day has given.

We meet no more!--

Tan. Oh barbarous Sigismunda!

And canst thou talk thus steadily? thus treat me

With such un pitying, unrelenting rigour?---

Poor is the love, that rather than give up

A little pride, a little formal pride,

The breath of vanity! can bear to see

The man, whose heart was once so dear to thine,

A prey to anguish, fury and distraction!—

Thou canst not surely make me such a wretch;

Thou canst not, Sigismunda!—Yet relent,

O save us yet!—Rodolpho, with my guards,

Waits in the garden—Let us seize the moments

We ne'er may have again—With more than power

I will

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 47

I will assert thee mine; with fairest honour.
The world shall ev'n approve; each honest bosom
Swells with a kindred joy, to see us happy.

Sig. The world approve!—What is the world to me!—

The conscious mind is its own awful world.—
And mine is fix'd.—Distress me then no more.
Not all the heart can plead (and it, alas!
Pleads but too much) shall ever shake the dictates
That tyrannize my breast.

Tan. 'Tis well—no more—

I yield me to my fate—Yes, yes, inhuman!
Since thy barbarian heart is steel'd by pride,
Shut up to love and pity, here behold me
Cast on the ground, a vile and abject wretch!
Lost to all cares, all dignities, all duties!—
Here will I grow, breathe out my faithful soul;
Here, at thy feet—Death, death alone shall part us!

Sig. Have you then vow'd to drive me to perdition?

What can I more!—Yes, Tancred, once again
I will forget the dignity my station
Commands me to sustain—for the last time
Will tell thee, that, I fear, no ties, no duty,
Can ever root thee from my hapless bosom.
O leave me! fly me! were it but in pity!—
For tho' th' emotions of my heart
Can ne'er alarm my virtue! yet, alas!
They tear it so, they pierce it with such anguish—
Oh! 'tis too much!—I cannot bear the conflict!

SCENE VII.

TANCRED. OSMOND. SIGISMUNDA.

OSMOND, entering.

Turn, tyrant! turn! and answer to my honour,
For this thy base, insufferable outrage!

Tan. Insolent traitor! think not to escape
Thyself my vengeance!

[They fight. OSMOND falls.]

Sig. Help here! help!—O Heavens!

[Throwing herself down by him.]

Alas! my lord, what meant your headlong rage?
That faith, which I, this day, upon the altar
To you devoted, is unblemish'd, pure
As vestal truth; was resolutely yours,
Beyond the power of aught on earth to shake it.

Qf.

48 TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Of. Perfidious woman! die! —

(Shortening his sword, he plunges it into her breast, and to the grave)

Attend a husband, yet but half aveng'd!

Tan. O horror! horror! execrable villain! —

Of. And, tyrant! thou! — thou shalt not o'er my tomb

Exult! — 'tis well — 'tis great — I die content. — [*Dies.*]

S C E N E VIII.

TANCRED. SIFFREDI. RODOLPHO. SIGISMUNDA. LAURA.

TANCRED. (*Throwing himself down by SIGISMUNDA.*)

Quick! here! bring aid! — Ah! that gentle bosom,
Pours fast the streams of life.

Sig. All aid is vain,

I feel the powerful hand of death upon me —

But oh it sheds a sweetness through my fate,

That I am thine again; and, without blame,

May in my Tancred's arms resign my soul!

Tan. Oh, death is in that voice; so gently mild,

So sadly sweet, as mixes ev'n with mine

The tears of hovering angels! — Mine again! —

And is it thus the cruel fates have join'd us?

Are these the horrid nuptials they prepare

For love like ours? — Yes, death shall soon unite us!

Sig. Live, live, my Tancred! — Let my death suffice

To expiate all that may have been amiss.

May it appease the fates, avert their fury

From thy propitious reign! —

(Observing SIFFREDI fixed in astonishment and grief.)

My father! — Oh! how shall I lift my eyes

To thee my sinking father!

Siff. Awful Heaven!

I am chastis'd! — My dearest child! —

Sig. Where am I?

A fearful darkness closes all around —

My friends! we needs must part — I must obey

Th' imperious call — Farewel, my Laura! cherish

My poor afflicted father's age — Rodolpho,

Now is the time to watch th' unhappy king,

With all the care and tenderness of friendship —

Oh my dear father! bow'd beneath the weight

Of age and grief — the victim ev'n of virtue!

Receive my last adieu! — Where art thou, Tancred?

Give

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. 49

Give me thy hand—But ah!—it cannot save me
From the dire King of Terrors, whose cold power
Creeps o'er my heart—Oh!

Tan. How these pangs distract me!
O lift thy gracious eyes! thou leav'st me then!
Thou leav'st me, Sigismunda!

Sig. Yet a moment—
I had, my Tancred, something more to say—
Yes—but thy love and tenderness for me
Sure make it needless—Harbour no resentment
Against my father; venerate his zeal,
That acted from a principle of goodness,
From faithful love to thee—Live, and maintain
My innocence embalm'd, with holiest care
Preserve my spotless memory!—I die—
Oh! 'tis the only sting of death to part
From those we love—from thee—farewell, my Tancred!
(Dies.)

Tan. Thus then!—

(Flying to his sword, is held by RODOLPHO

Ro. Hold! hold! my lord!—Have you forgot
Your Sigismunda's last request already?

Tan. Off! set me free! think not to bind me down
With barb'rous friendship, to the rack of life!
What hand can shut the thousand thousand gates,
Which death still opens to the woes of mortals?—
Off! traitors, off! or my distracted soul
Will burst indignant from this gaol of nature,
To where she beckons yonder—No, mild seraph!
Point not to life—I cannot linger here,
Cut off from thee, the miserable pity,
The scorn of human-kind! a trampled king!
O shame! O agony! O the fell stings
Of late, of vain repentance!—Ha! my brain
Is all on fire! a wild abyss of thought!—
Th' infernal world discloses! see! behold him!
Lo, with fierce smiles he shakes the bloody steel,
And mocks my feeble tears!—Hence! quickly hence!
Spurn his vile carcase! give it to the dogs!
Expose it to the winds and screaming ravens!
Ah, impotence of rage!—What am I?—Where?
Sad, silent, all?—The forms of dumb despair,
Around some mournful tomb!—What do I see?
This soft abode of innocence and love
Turn'd to the house of death! a place of horror!—
Ah!

● TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! that poor corse! pale! pale! deform'd with
murder!

Is that my Sigismunda? [*Throwing himself down by her.*]

SIFFREDI, *after a pathetic pause, looking on the
scene before him.*

Have I liv'd

To these enfeebled years, by Heaven reserv'd,

To be a dreadful monument of justice?---

Rodolpho, raise the king, and bear him hence

From this distracting scene of blood and death.

Behold the fatal work of my dark hand,
That by rude force the passions would command,
That ruthless sought to root them from the breast;
They may be rul'd, but will not be oppress'd.
Taught hence, ye parents, who from Nature stray,
And the great ties of social life betray;
Ne'er with your children act a tyrant's part:
'Tis your's to guide, not violate the heart.
Ye vainly wise, who o'er mankind preside,
Behold any righteous woes, and drop your pride!
Keep virtue's simple path before your eyes,
Nor think from evil good can ever rise.

F I N I S.

